



Blue Spruce 2026 Nominees – Annotations and Content



Bannock in a Hammock

Written by Masiana Kelly and Illustrated by Amiel Sandland

Published by Inhabit Media

Big or small, sweet or savoury, with stew or with sprinkles, there are tons of ways to enjoy bannock!

This rhyming book explores a favourite Inuit food, and has some fun along the way. What's your favourite way to eat bannock?

Try it at home with the included bannock recipe!

Written by Inuk/Dene writer Masiana Kelly, this sweet and simple narrative celebrates this delicious food!

Content/ Discussion Themes:

Food, Family, Community, Traditional Food, Culture, Inuit & Indigenous characters

The Beat of the Dragon Boat

Written by Christina Matula and Illustrated by Nicole Wong

Published by Sleeping Bear Press

The Chinese Dragon Boat Festival takes place on the fifth day of the fifth month of the lunar calendar, ushering in the start of summer. On the night before the Dragon Boat Festival, a young boy asks his grandfather how the dragon boat races first began. His grandfather tells him that legend has it that the races started in the ancient time of the Dragon King, when every lake and river had a guardian dragon. Dragons symbolize good luck, and have great power, especially over water and weather.

On race day at the harbor, all the boats have a carved dragon head on their bows. As a final touch, to wake up their team's boat, the boy paints in the dragon's eye. But once the race is underway, their team's dragon boat is in last place. How can they wake their dragon?

Content/ Discussion Themes:

Grandparent and grandchild relationship, Chinese Dragon Boat Racing, Family, Culture and tradition

Fox and the Mystery Letter

Written and Illustrated by Alex G. Griffiths

Published by Frances Lincoln Children's Books

In the dense forest, in a lonely cottage, there lives Fox. Fox is perfectly happy all by himself—until one day, a letter arrives: "Dear Fox: I know how much you enjoy puzzles. I bet you can't resist this one . . . Head to the forest path to begin your journey. From an old friend." Fox doesn't need any mysterious puzzles, adventures, or memories of his old . . . But he stops himself from finishing the thought. Still, it can't hurt to look at the first clue. Of course, one clue leads to the next: Fox follows arrows in the mud, notes taped to trees, swirling smoke signals, a map from a bottle, and gifts from fellow animals—on the trail of a friendship that once was. Author-illustrator Alex G. Griffiths creates an irresistible mystery for readers to solve in this witty, whimsical picture book—with important themes of friendship, forgiveness, and opening up about your feelings.

Content/ Discussion Themes:

Mystery, Friendship, Relationships, Forgiveness, Feelings and Emotions, Understanding, Forgiveness, Second Chances

The Friendship Blanket

Written by Leonarda Carranza and Illustrated by Erika Rodriguez Medina

Published by Scholastic Canada Ltd.

Aurelia has left home, and her beloved grandmother — Abuelita — to move to a new country with her mother. At first she's excited about the neighbourhood with the big trees. She loves her room, which Mami says she can paint any colour she wants. And she's looking forward to starting school and making new friends.

But school isn't what she expected. Some of her classmates tease her for being different, and she's left out of schoolyard games. She ends up feeling quite alone. With the help of a blanket Abuelita has given her, and the love it signifies, Aurelia returns to school with a new perspective and makes a true connection.

Inspired by the author's own experiences, this story is a touching and age-appropriate depiction of what it's like to experience racism and exclusion, and what it means to find friendship.

Content/ Discussion Themes:

Racism, Exclusion, Friendship, Immigration, Family, Mindset

The Girl Who Loved Poutine

Written by Lorna Schultz Nicholson and illustrated by Rachel Qiuqi

Published by Sleeping Bear Press

Zoe loves poutine with its French fries, gravy, and squeaky squeaky cheese curds. It's her favourite dish to make with her father. And it's their annual tradition to make it for their shared

July 1 birthday. Zoey is excited. Tomorrow is her fifth birthday! It's also a holiday in Canada. This year, family members--grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins--from across Canada are coming to celebrate Zoey's birthday. But as a surprise to Zoey, everyone is bringing their own special poutine dish. There are recipes from all over Canada, including Alberta, Quebec, and Prince Edward Island. All so unique and all so delicious! It will be a poutine contest and Zoey will be the judge. How will Zoey ever decide whose dish is the winner? Back matter includes information about the history of this classic dish, as well as a recipe.

Content/ Discussion Themes:

Birthdays, Family, Food, Connections, Canadian Provinces & Territories

The Great Dinosaur Sleepover

Written by Linda Bailey and illustrated by Joe Bluhm

Published by Tundra Books

Jake loves dinosaurs, so with his birthday coming up, he knows just what kind of party he wants — a dinosaur sleepover! Dino games, dino balloons, dino cake. Dino everything! But when the big day arrives, his friends all come down with the flu, and the party seems to be on the edge of extinction.

Then, in the middle of the night, Jake hears a strange noise and goes to investigate. To his surprise, he finds some prehistoric party guests right there in his living room! They've invited themselves in to make sure Jake has a birthday

he'll never forget —just don't tell the T-Rex!

An unforgettable birthday tale with *huge* laughs and heart, this newest picture book from acclaimed author Linda Bailey celebrates friendship, inclusion and fun – and is brought to life with magnificent, cinematic artwork from award-winning animation director and illustrator Joe Bluhm.

Content/ Discussion Themes:

Imagination, Friendship, Silliness, Dinosaurs, Birthdays

It's Okay, Just Ask

Written by Monique Leonardo Carlos and illustrated by Salini Perera

Published by OwlKids Books

A little girl and her family are emigrating to a new country. As they say goodbye to their home and move to an unfamiliar place, the girl is full of questions: Will they ever return? What if she doesn't make new friends? Why does she look different than the other kids? Her mother's supportive refrain encourages her to voice her curiosity: *It's okay, just ask!*

Sometimes the answers lead to exciting discoveries. Other times, the answers are unclear, or prompt even *more* questions. But each time the girl chooses to *just ask*, she learns more about her community and herself.

Partially based on the author's own experience moving her family from the Philippines to Canada, this is a thoughtful, child-centered look at being a newcomer. While exploring the specific experience of immigrants, it also shares a more universal message about speaking up when uncertain or confused. It welcomes readers to ask questions when they're unsure, and approach different people and places with an open mind.

Content/ Discussion Themes:

Immigration, Questioning, Asking for help or clarification, Having an open mind, Welcoming others, Family

The Most Magnificent Team

Written and illustrated by Ashley Spires

Published by Kids Can Press

New for fans of the runaway bestseller *The Most Magnificent Thing*, a story about the ups and downs of working with others.

A girl and her dog are ready to make something. She gathers her supplies, and they head to her favorite workspace – only to discover that her neighbor, along with her cat, got there first! Hmm, well, maybe they could make something together? Magnificent idea! So the girl starts cutting, hammering and gluing, while her neighbor considers, measures and calculates. Her neighbor believes in always measuring twice and cutting once, but the girl thinks that takes way too long. Tensions start to rise as it becomes clear they have very different styles of working. And even different ideas about exactly what they're making! Can they ever work things out as a team? Blending humor with empathy to strike just the right note, Ashley Spires perfectly captures the emotional ups and downs of working with others in this celebration of collaboration in the creative process. As the girl perseveres through technical and emotional challenges, she learns that mistakes don't mean failure and setbacks are just part of the route to success. This amusing and inspiring picture book is part of the *Most Magnificent* franchise that includes books, a TV series and an award-winning short film. The series is a favorite among educators because of its growth mindset focus, and this title highlights another important theme in the classroom: teamwork.

Content/ Discussion Themes:

Teamwork, Cooperation, Growth Mindset, Celebrating mistakes and failures, Learning from our mistakes and failures, Creativity, Makerspace, Learning styles

Patty Dreams

Written by Nadia L. Hohn and illustrated by Sahle Robinson

Published by OwlKids Books

At his home in Jamaica, August wakes up every morning to the delicious smell of patties. His parents' patty stand used to be popular, but Jamaica is changing. August's friends are leaving, and the patties aren't selling like they used to. Soon, it's his family's turn to say goodbye. Off they fly to cold, snowy Toronto, where August's father takes a job at a cookie factory and comes home too tired to make his beloved patties.

One night, after everyone is asleep, August tiptoes into the kitchen and tries to recreate his Daddy's recipe. His attempt inspires his father, and for the first time since they left Jamaica, August wakes up to the smell of fresh patties. Daddy's patties take off, and soon August's parents decide to open a new patty stand with a new name—"Patty Dreams".

Acclaimed author Nadia L. Hohn's rhythmic writing pays homage to a quintessential Jamaican delicacy and explores the experiences of immigrants, as well as the traditions that connect us. Vibrantly illustrated and rich in sensory details, this picture book is a warm, comforting reminder of the meaning of home.

Content/ Discussion Themes:

Culture, Family, Community Connections, Cooking, Traditions, Immigration, Food

The Weedflower

Written by Elizatbeth Davaze and illustrated by

Marianne Ferrer

Published by OwlKids Books

One day on the gray school playground, Sam notices something new. Against all odds, a little flower has sprouted in between the concrete and rubber turf.

Sam adores the tiny bud. She sings to it, admires it, and watches it bloom into a bright yellow flower that's ultimately too large to hide. Soon the other students notice it, too. Under their care, the flower thrives, illuminating the gloomy playground and eventually—magically—changing into one perfect fluffball that dances in the wind.

But when the adults take notice, they decide it has to go ...

A sunny story with warm illustrations that will encourage readers to take notice of the natural world, *The Weedflower* makes for a great read-aloud. It will tie in well with environmental and character education curriculum while also highlighting the positive role that nature plays in our lives.

Content/ Discussion Themes:

Wonder, Care of the Environment, Nature, Protecting the Natural World, Community, Respect for Nature, Mobilizing for an important cause